

ARC eases tedious backup process

Backing up computer data is like fastening your car's seat belt. In the instant that you wish you had, it's too late.

To help make the job easier is a new type of backup system that uses an unconventional approach. It's called the ARC 8060 and offers continuous and fully automated data backup. But that's not to say it's trouble-free.

This 60-megabyte, \$1,695 system is designed so that an office can survive everything from power failures to disk crashes with impunity. And, if the removable streaming tape is taken out of the office building, you're protected against fire and theft as well. In all cases, ARC's nonstop backups allow data reconstruction right up to the last tragic moment.

The ARC unit I tested consisted of an external tape drive, a tape cassette like the familiar audio type, and a controller card.

Here are some special features:



Hillel Segal

■ When it's installed and operating correctly, backups are always done and are always up-to-the-minute.

■ The compact tape cassettes are easy to store off site.

■ All file transactions are time- and date-stamped and can be restored by time or date, file name, or subdirectory.

■ An automatic "audit trail" provides security and history of project version changes; allows full or partial reconstruction of earlier versions.

On the downside, while using the device over several months, two annoying problems were experienced. First, the rechargeable batteries proved to be unreliable. The

ARC unit stores the most recent data in its own memory and then writes the data to tape at user-specified intervals. In the event of a sudden power loss, the memory's contents are protected by rechargeable batteries. Apparently the batteries in our unit had little reserve.

Second, if the ARC was turned off without giving its normal "LOGOFF" command, it was often unable to start up the next time without the operator issuing a series of re-initializing commands. This happened at least weekly for one reason or another. These extra steps marred an otherwise hands-off, automated routine.

This ARC unit is available from Digital Storage System, 1234 Sherman Drive, Longmont 80501, Telephone (303) 449-9684. But there are several other units available in the ARC line of products. All support MS/DOS 3.0 or greater on IBM PCs and compatibles. Among the

others are the ARC 6000 for existing internal tape drives (\$595), the ARC 7060 internal half-height 60 MB tape drive (\$995), and the faster ARC 9060 external 60-megabyte tape drive (\$2,323).

■ The bottom line: The dreariest job in computing isn't backing up. It's the far more loathsome task of rebuilding data after a disaster. The ARC devices are designed to eliminate that possibility forever, because you'll never have to remember to do a backup again. Supposedly, it's all done automatically for you. Unfortunately, in testing the 8060, it turned out to be less automatic and more troublesome than I anticipated, I can't give it an unqualified recommendation.

Hillel Segal's column includes evaluations of gadgets, seminars and books designed to enhance business productivity. Segal is a management consultant based in Boulder.